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Hollywood's Hindering of Homosexuality for Heroes: Sexuality in Comic Books and Their Movies

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Running Head: Hollywood's Hindering of Homosexuality for Heroes

Hollywood's Hindering of Homosexuality for Heroes:

Sexuality in Comic Books and Their Movies

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Since the inception of comic books, superheroes have populated American households. These heroes, such as Superman, Batman, and Spider-Man, instill various values in youth. These values include honor, strength, and justice. Comic books have become a staple of America and have recently regained interest through film adaptations. These films reinforce the hegemonic masculinity and limited opportunities of women. While the comic books themselves also impose these themes, they also have begun to introduce LGBT themes into storylines and characters. However, these LGBT themes continuously get removed as the stories transform from comic book to film. The purpose of this thesis is to illustrate how traditional themes of hyper heterosexuality become fortified and queer themes of LGBT characters are eradicated.

This analysis examines three comic book series and their movie counterparts. The film and comic book pairs included in this thesis are *Green Lantern* (film in 2011), *X-Men* (multiple films in 2000, 2003, 2006, 2011, and 2014) and *Thor* (films in 2011 and 2013). *Green Lantern* comic book series describes the life of a fighter pilot, Hal Jordan, who receives an alien ring that can create anything he can imagine. With this power, Jordan joins other beings from across the universe to defeat evil. Jordan's love interest, Carol Ferris, eventually receives a ring in the comic book version as well, allowing her to spread goodness across the universe. The *X-Men* characters are mutants who developed

special powers and skills as they grew and matured. These skills include psychic ability, regenerative properties, and weather manipulation. While often rejected by mankind, these mutants team up to subdue radical mutants and humans who wish to exterminate mutants. *Thor* depicts the title character and other gods of Asgard in their mission to keep the universe safe. Because the comic book and film often take place on earth, Thor develops a relationship with a human, Jane Foster.

Literature Review

In this paper, three main themes will be examined. First, the perpetual use of the hegemonic male will be examined to illustrate the dominance of hegemonic masculinity in the comic genre. Next, a look into the restrictive roles of females in comic books and their movie counterparts will illustrate the limited freedom that women characters possess. Finally, the presence and absence of LGBT themes in the print version and the absence of these same LGBT themes in the film adaptations will be examined. I argue that the print version are much more gender and LGBT friendly than their movie counterparts would reveal. In analyzing the information gathered, a clearer understanding of how these themes evolve yet remain stagnant over time will be revealed.

While other scholars have established definitions of hegemonic masculinity, this paper examines how comic books and comic book films perpetuate this ideology. Definitions from Trujillo (1991), Gee (2009), and Messner, Dunbar, and Hunt (2000) began to structure a definition of a hegemonic man, what men are included in this definition, and what men become excluded. Brothers (2011) and Baker (2014) elaborated on the racial aspect of hegemonic masculinity in comic books, but the role of African American characters in comic books films has yet to be explored. In an article examining one of the superheroes from *X-Men*, Brooks (2009) demonstrated how hegemonic masculinity changes over time and how comic book characters in their print versions adapt to these changes. However, the film relationship to this concept remains undetermined. This paper will fill that void.

The restrictive roles of females section describes how women in comic book series fall into two major categories: damsels in distress or Eve-like temptresses. Berger (1973) enforced the idea of the helpless female with his description of the societal expectation of women. This concept only reflects perceptions of women over 40 years ago and has not been applied to comic books or their movies. The connotations of brotherhood and sisterhood describe the positive light society sheds on male bonding (Lavanco, *et al.*, 2007) and negative aspects society attributes to sisterhood (del Carmen

Rodriguez Fernandez, 2000). This paper will extrapolate this theme to demonstrate its connection with comic books and comic book movies. Brown (2011) helped introduce the treacherous female persona by asking what role these females aim to achieve. These women have been compared to dominatrixes with their skintight clothing and appearance of power (Clark-Flory, 2012). Fairley (2014) described the distrust among females of each other. This theme contributes to the concept of treacherous females. None of these analyses have determined how these themes become erased in the transition from print to screen. More information from the comic books and films is used to demonstrate the limited parts women are allowed to portray in the comic book universe.

Lastly, the LGBT section enforces the ways in which hegemonic masculinity and either the damsel in distress or treacherous female no longer dominate every comic book series yet remain supreme in film. Palmer-Mehta & Hay (2005) illustrate the reactions to a comic book issue containing a hate crime against two gay men. A study by Ryan (2009) expanded on the problems faced by people who identify as LGBT. While these print ideas have been analyzed, the disappearance of LGBT themes as comic books become movies is not recognized. In an article by Peters (2003), the lesbian themes in *Wonder Woman* were explored. Theophano (2002) discussed the frequently questioned LGBT themes of Batman and Robin as well as Superman and Jimmy Olsen's

relationships. While many people have questioned these superheroes' sexuality, especially in connection to sidekicks and villains, the eradication of these homosexual themes in movies has not appeared in studies. Adding to the discussion of the Superman and Jimmy Olsen relationship, Morrison and Quitely (2006) elaborated on Olsen's crossdressing, however, these scholars omit how these images do not manifest in the films. Shyminsky (2011) illustrated the LGBT themes of sidekicks and how this affects the superheroes in the comics, but does not address the films. McAllister (2004) explained how comic books have discussed other societal themes, including the AIDS scare during the 1980s. Despite the attention given to societal issues in comic books, scholars have not mentioned how comic book movies fail to address any of these same themes. Medhurst (1991) set the argument for various hints to homosexuality present in the comic books. This paper adds to the conversation by examining how these extend to comic book movies. In an article from 2004, Lendrum illustrated the LGBT themes in the Comic Code and how these no longer exist. Despite some controversy, Frohard-Dourlent (2012) described the progressive ideas in the comic book adaptation of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. The questions raised in this article have not been applied to other comic books or comic book movies.

Despite the progressive nature of comic books through their inclusion of LGBT themes, comic book movies have not adopted these ideas and instead rely on traditional models of masculinity and femininity.

Hegemonic Masculinity

In comic books, hegemonic masculinity plays a major role in shaping the characters and plotlines. While hegemonic masculinity has experienced minor alterations over time, many of the same themes remain today since comic book characters were created. Multiple working definitions of hegemonic masculinity exist.

Because sports figures are often perceived as superheroes in society, examining how athletics frame hegemonic masculinity helps create the description of hegemonic masculinity for comic book characters. Trujillo (1991) define five aspects of hegemonic masculinity in America: physical force and control, occupational achievement, familial patriarchy, frontiersmanship, and heterosexuality (p. 291). While these themes coincide with the baseball player being analyzed, they more broadly apply to society's understanding of hegemonic masculinity. These same themes appear in both comic books and comic book movies.

In her analysis of the National Hockey League's "Inside the Warrior" advertising campaign, Gee (2009) adds to the description of hegemonic masculinity. Gee lists aggression, heterosexuality, muscularity, the suppression of fear, intentional physical

demonstrations of power and dominance, and the subordinated role of women as components of hegemonic masculinity (p. 581).

As sports work to define society, other scholars have used the realm of sports to define masculinity. Some aspects of "The Televised Sports Manhood Formula" include white males as authority figures, sports belonging to men, aggressiveness winning over kindness, "boys will be boys," and competing through physical injury (Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000). While not all of society follows sports, they comprise an entire section of most newspapers and create many avid fans. Similarly, not all of society reads comic books, but the characters must embody the superior being and, therefore, also must align with accepted and desired ideas of humans.

In combining aspects of these various definitions, hegemonic masculinity, as used in this essay, is defined as involving white heterosexual men with muscularity and attractiveness, aggression, suppression of fear, and dominance over women. These themes work to demonstrate the connection between hegemonic masculinity and comic book characters.

White men have largely dominated the superhero universe. While several comic books originated in the 1940s, including *Green Lantern*, appearances by Africans or African-Americans followed more closely to civil rights movements occurring in 1960s

America. An African-American male did not gain his own regularly published comic until 1972 with Luke Cage (Brothers, 2011). Of the nine best-selling comic book series of all time as of 2014, two were Japanese-based, one featured African-Americans as well as Caucasians as main characters, and the remaining six all featured white lead characters (Baker, 2014). In regards to top grossing comic book movies, no African-American starred in the lead role but instead worked to give assistance to the lead in the form of underground supplies, such as Morgan Freeman's character Lucius Fox in *The Dark Knight* and *The Dark Knight Rises*, or acted as sidekicks, as Zoe Saldana did with her character Gamora in *Guardians of the Galaxy* ("Comic Book Adaptations," 2015). By analyzing *Green Lantern*, *X-Men* and *Thor*, these same themes apply. In the movie *Green Lantern*, there are only two named African-American characters. The *X-Men* films feature African-American characters, but none are major plot-changing roles, as the only African-American in *X-Men* only has a total of 20 lines in the first film ("*X-Men*," 2000). The same roles apply in the *Thor* films as two characters are African-American yet neither serve in major roles, as the two have a combined 23 lines in the entire first film. On the movie posters of these films, white men are prominently featured while African-Americans are either nonexistent or some form of mutant in the background.

This marginalization makes white men appear superior to other races and strengthens their place as hegemonic men.

In addition to race contributing to the hegemonic masculinity of comic book heroes, sexuality plays an interesting role in comic books and their movies. The three series being investigated in this paper, (*Green Lantern*, *X-Men*, and *Thor*), approach sexuality in the comic books differently from their movie counterparts. This idea will be explored more in detail in the third section of this article.

The overall appearance of the heroes coincides with societal themes of hegemonic masculinity. Superheroes have similar physiques to keep them within the bounds of hegemonic masculinity. In the comic book series, Green Lantern first appeared as a man with a square jaw and muscles hidden under his loose fitting costume. In the most recent comic book series, Green Lantern appears with a square jaw, skintight clothing to illustrate his numerous muscles, and hair that falls perfectly despite his intensive physical activity. The film version also depicts the characteristics of the modern Green Lantern, along with the sexual appeal of Ryan Reynolds who had won *People* magazine's Sexiest Man Alive the year before the film was released ("Sexiest Man Alive Archive," 2015).

The series of films about the comic *X-Men* also feature these similar physiques. One of the major characters of the films, Wolverine, has great strength and a rugged

appearance. His beard was not part of the all of his various costumes and looks in the comic but demonstrates the minor changes to hegemonic masculinity that incur over time (Brooks, 2009). The actor, Hugh Jackman, also won *People* magazine's Sexist Man Alive, stating this role as Wolverine as part of the reason for the award ("Sexist Man Alive Archive"). As a mutant, Wolverine's power of regeneration also improves his sexual appearance. Wolverine's appearance is not tarnished in battle because his body is able to repair any scratches or bruises within seconds. In addition to Wolverine, *X-Men* films also feature Colossus and the Juggernaut, who play lesser roles than Wolverine but equally demonstrate the hegemonic masculinity of the comic books and their movies. In the comics, Colossus is described as a Russian who moved to America. His body can transform into a steel-like substance, which enhances his strength, endurance, and speed ("Colossus (Piotr Rasputin)," n.d.). These attributes enhance his standing as a hegemonic male. In the films, Colossus plays a minor role and his Russian background is not recognized. This also enhances the superiority of American men over others. The Juggernaut can go through any object in front of him with his brute force. The film, *X-Men: The Last Stand* (2006), and the comics show the Juggernaut using his defined muscles to power through walls and other barriers ("Juggernaut (Cain Marko)," n.d.).

This focus on strength and overall physique demonstrates how *X-Men* value and demonstrate hegemonic masculinity.

In *Thor*, both Thor and Loki exhibit hegemonic masculinity through their physique. Thor has superhuman strength, endurance, and resistance to injury. This is paired with his flowing golden hair and defined facial structure (“Thor (Thor Odinson),” n.d.). In the films, Thor demonstrates these same attributes. To demonstrate this, the actor, Chris Hemsworth, was recognized as an honorable mention for *People* magazine’s Sexist Man Alive (“Sexist Man Alive Archive”). Additionally, the character Loki, Thor’s adopted brother, has extreme strength along with his shape shifting capability (“Loki,” n.d.). While the films do not focus on the physical strength of Tom Hiddleston, the actor portraying Loki, he has created an enormous following with his fans, also known as Loki’s Army.

Aggression is another key aspect of hegemonic masculinity, which becomes exemplified through comic books and their movies. The 2013-2014 television season showed the importance America places on aggression. Of the top ten broadcast shows for this season, football had three of the highest ratings with NFL *Sunday Night Football* having the highest rated show of the season (Rice, 2014). The game of football comprises of men channeling their aggression to crush the other team, both literally and

figuratively. Along with this popularity, aggressive players are rewarded while nice guys are forgotten. The National Football League and the Associated Press have awarded the most valuable player since 1957 ("National Football League MVPs," 2009). However, it was not until 2014 that the NFL created a sportsmanship award ("NFL creates Sportsmanship Award," 2014). Aggression, therefore, has come to be valued over kindness and fair play.

In comic books, this appreciation of aggression exists as well. Similar to football, comic book heroes must defeat their enemy in order to win the recognition, appreciation, and glory from the people they save. Before Hal Jordan, the alter ego of Green Lantern, learned to use his power to defeat his enemies, Jordan was not noticed by the community at large or his love interest as an honorable man. Jordan actually was dishonorably discharged from the Air Force prior to receiving and harnessing his powers. After his lessons and battles with his enemies, he became a respected man and gained the attention of his sexual desire ("Hal Jordan," n.d.). Green Lantern also must fight off enemies and channel this aggression in the film adaptation.

The *X-Men* comic books and films also demonstrate this aggression. Many characters in the series demonstrate this passion for aggression. Beast is animalistic, as his name implies. In the films, he often roars to demonstrate his dominance and lust for

battle. Cyclops also exhibits aggression to both enemies and other X-Men. In the comic books and the movies, Wolverine favors Jean Grey, Cyclop's sexual companion. This creates another opportunity for Cyclops and Wolverine to express aggression. Wolverine also constantly dives into battle without fully thinking through the consequences. This displays his longing for aggressive behavior.

Because of the governmental ties in the series, many disagreements in *Thor* could be solved diplomatically but instead resort to battle. Thor, the son of the king of Asgard, has the opportunity to discuss issues with his enemies. However, fighting overrules discussion as exhibited by the countless fights with his adopted brother Loki and few diplomatic settlements. In the films, Thor chooses to use his hammer, which houses extreme power, more than his diplomacy to resolve issues.

These comic book heroes must also suppress their fear in order to accomplish their goals. Boys and men have frequently been told to "man up" in response to statements of worry or concern. Fear is often perceived as a weakness and an insult to one's masculinity. In both the comic book and movie *Green Lantern*, Hal Jordan learns to quash his fear of piloting after his father was killed in a plane crash during a test-flight. Jordan enlists in the Air Force and becomes known for his reckless flying technique

("Green Lantern, DC Comics," n.d.). This illustrates how Jordan chose to ignore his fears and heedlessly demonstrates his dominance over fear.

The X-Men must frequently suppress their fears to demonstrate their hegemonic masculinity. Many characters in the comic books and films scorn the X-Men for being mutants. While some of the women mutants become offended and disheartened by these comments, the men either brush these ideas off or find such statements infuriating. Wolverine subdues his fear of his agonizing past and the experiments performed on him to enhance his mutant abilities. These memories bring back ideas of physical pain that cause Wolverine to seek out the truth rather than run from it. This truth seeking quest without fear is a major plot point and carries across four of the films: *X-Men*, *X2*, *X-Men: The Last Stand*, and *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*. Wolverine works to extend his hegemonic masculinity through this search.

Thor also must ignore his fears in the comic books and the films. Thor must balance his life on Earth and his life on his home planet of Asgard. During his time away from Asgard, many troubles arise that necessitate his attention. He leaves Earth to deal with these issues without fearing for the parts of his life that stay on Earth. Instead, Thor engulfs himself in battles without fearing for his life. In the first film of the series, Thor demonstrates concern for his Earth girlfriend but becomes comforted by being told that

she is looking for him. This quickly eradicates any fear he once possessed for her well-being. This eradication of fear illustrates how superheroes embody hegemonic masculinity.

These hegemonic men also display their dominance over women. While many comic books have adapted to modern times by including non-heterosexual characters, most of these characters do not have the same level of control over women. Loki does manipulate the women he impersonates but other male LGBT characters such as Apollo and Midnighter of *Stormwatch* and Hooded Justice and Captain Metropolis of *Watchmen* live more aloofly and do not control the women around them. This concept of hegemonic men dominating women will be examined more in the next section.

Restrictive Roles of Females

Many women in comic books and especially comic book films are subjected into traditional social positions. While several women have been granted their own comic book series, numerous characters fall into two restrictive roles. Some of these women characters portray damsels in distress, needing male supervision and assistance. Other women are confined into acting as Eve-like temptresses who deceive men with their bodies and seduction techniques. Comic book women often become restricted in the roles available to them.

Women of comic books frequently become the damsels in distress. These women are very dependent on men in regards to their safety and decision-making. Carol Ferris, Hal Jordan's (Green Lantern) girlfriend, is portrayed as extremely weak and needing assistance. While Ferris owns and operates the Ferris Aircrafts business, she inherited the business after her father's retirement. Therefore, she did not work for her position. Later in the series Ferris becomes consumed by power bestowed upon her. These characteristics leave Ferris frail and uncertain about her life.

In the *Green Lantern* comics and film, Ferris frequently gets captured by an enemy and requires Jordan's assistance in her rescue. In one of the first issues with

Ferris, Jordan and she are driving, and Ferris begins to ask Jordan if he is the Green Lantern. While driving, the road suddenly ends and their car falls over the edge. Ferris faints out of fright of falling to her death, but Jordan uses the power of his Green Lantern ring to save them both (Broome, 1960). Despite being unconscious and not knowing how she survived the fall, Ferris does not believe that Jordan is the Green Lantern. This needing of assistance and lack of understanding demonstrates Ferris's frailty and need of protection. This need of protection extends to her alter ego, Star Sapphire. Star Sapphire is unable to control her power, as will be discussed later in this section.

In the film version, Ferris cannot defend herself and primarily becomes an object of the male gaze. The owner of the gaze holds power. As Berger states, "Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at."

Berger continues by stating how women transform themselves into objects to be visually seen (Berger, 1972). In this way Ferris becomes an object of sight. She does not take action and seeks merely to be viewed sexually by Jordan and the audience.

The *X-Men* series has many damsels in distress even though these women have powers comparable to those of the men. One of these members, Rogue, has a complicated story that keeps her reliant on several different groups. Born Anna Marie, Rogue ran away from home after her mother disappeared and life with her father became

strained. Her runaway nature led to her nickname. After kissing a boy and leaving him in a coma, Rogue discovered her power to absorb the energy or power from people and mutants. Frightened by this ability, Rogue sought out guidance. This fear made Rogue appear weak and an easy target for groups to convince her how to manage her powers. Initially, a treacherous female mutant, Mystique, brought Rogue into an evil group, Brotherhood of Mutants. The Brotherhood of Mutants attempted to kill people who opposed mutants. While many of the Brotherhood's members are female, including the leader Destiny, the use of a masculine term for the group reveals a societal theme. Brotherhood has connotations of support, conflict resolution, and reciprocally aiding others (Lavano, 2007). Sisterhood, however, connotes thoughts of feminism, which fluctuates in society's perception throughout time. In an analysis of the book *The White Garden*, sisterhood is symbolized through a delicate piece of lace (Rodriguez Fernandez, 2000). The camaraderie of brotherhood versus the delicate nature of sisterhood demonstrates the patriarchal power over frail females.

Once Rogue begins to question the ways of the Brotherhood, she seeks out alternative supervision. This comes from the X-Men leader, Professor Charles Xavier. Speaking as a voice of understanding, the Professor accepts Rogue into his group. The X-Men and the Brotherhood of Mutants represent the differences in leadership, as

perceived by society. The Brotherhood, led by a female, is evil and fails in many tasks. Conversely, the X-Men have male leadership and have wholesome intentions with much success. This demonstrates how the comics portray women leaders as treacherous and flawed while men are pure and effective.

In the film *X-Men*, Rogue does not seek the guidance of women. Instead, she accompanies the masculine Wolverine to find Professor Xavier and request his assistance in understanding their powers. Xavier's friend and antagonist, Magneto, kidnaps Rogue to manipulate and kill in order to fulfill his personal agenda. Rogue cannot save herself from the control of this male character and must be rescued by her initial source of direction, Wolverine. Wolverine valiantly risks his life to save Rogue while Rogue gets labeled as helpless and dependent on men.

Another X-Men character exhibits damsel in distress attributes. Jean Grey is a complex character who evolves into a temptress throughout the series. Grey possesses telekinetic and telepathic powers. Because her powers were so strong when she was a young girl, Professor Xavier chose to limit Grey's powers until she was mature enough to use them. This demonstrates the masculine power over a female who is interpreted as requiring guidance. Xavier eventually grants Grey her full powers and acceptance into

the newly formed X-Men. This decision later proves detrimental to the group and society as a whole.

In the film adaptation of the comic, Grey's male companion questions her abilities. The film makes clear that Grey has great power within her. This power, however, is viewed as threatening to the men around her. Not only has she been under the watchful eye of Professor Xavier, but her boyfriend, Scott Summers/Cyclops, feels he must protect her as well. In *X2: X-Men United*, even though Grey is the group's last chance at success, Summers does not have faith in Grey's abilities and believes using them will overpower her. This deeply discourages Grey. It is only after Logan/Wolverine states his belief in her that Grey agrees to use her skills. Grey's need for male guidance and lack of autonomy reveal how she is depicted as a powerless female.

The comic book and film versions of *Thor* also contain a weak female in need of male control. Because Thor resides from an interstellar planet that is the land of gods, terrestrial beings automatically appear lesser than a god. This power differential becomes intensified through Thor's relationship with the human Jane Foster. In the films, Foster works as an understudy scientist for Dr. Erik Selvig researching theoretical astrophysics. Even though Selvig eventually goes insane, Foster's title ranks her below this man. This

exemplifies how the title and thus the power are viewed as masculine traits despite the ability of either person. Because Foster pursues a career in science, on the surface she may seem progressive, as scientific research positions are historically male. However, because she allows Dr. Selvig to display his power over her, she remains weak. Foster also gets confused with her findings and requires Selvig or Thor's assistance to understand them.

In addition to her terrestrial inaptitude, Foster is not viewed as worthy enough in Asgard. After falling in love with Thor, he asks for Foster to accompany him to his home. By calling upon the female to abandon her life parallels the medieval tradition of the woman moving in with the man she has been arranged to marry. The king of Asgard and Thor's father, Odin, does not approve of Foster and her human frailty. Because of his displeasure, Odin assigns a test for Foster to prove her worth before she is allowed to live in Asgard as a goddess. Odin changes Foster from human to Asgardian with great powers. Foster becomes overwhelmed, causing Odin to declare that she had failed her test and sends her back to Earth as a human. Odin's ploy and Foster's fear and inability depict how the power of men and febleness of submissive females are portrayed in comic books.

Foster also frequently requires rescuing from danger. Throughout the comic book series, Foster often discovers herself in the hands of the enemy. In the films, this theme reappears. In the first film, Thor must protect all of mankind from extermination. Even though Foster has been researching extraterrestrials such as Thor and the monster that invades Earth, she cannot fully understand Thor and remains powerless to the monster attacking. In the second film, not only does Foster still fail to understand Thor and his world as well as passively avoiding battle, she also becomes captured and cannot free herself. Malekith, the primary villain of the film, kidnaps her, causing Thor to fall into his trap in order to save her. These actions create a weak female who cannot process complex thoughts or fight for her own life.

While these weak women require the guidance and security of the men in their lives, other women in comic books and their film counterparts display women as treacherous and sexually deviant to men and untrusting of other women. This illuminates the question as to whether these women are legitimate villains or merely imitating their male counterparts (Brown, 2011). Because the role of the powerful woman appears to create dissonance with the idea of hegemonic masculinity, a more careful exploration into these characters is necessary to create an understanding.

Many of these seductive women wear tight, revealing spandex costumes. This appearance and powerful demeanor align perfectly with that of a dominatrix. This ideology allows females to display power over men yet still act as the object of sexual desire for the men in the comic books and comic book movies as well as the target audience of adolescent male readers. By acting as a dominatrix, these women take on the role of a male just to the extent that a dominatrix does. The appeal of a dominatrix stems from the desire to escape. Men who seek out an experience with a dominatrix pursue a vacation from the stress in their lives. These men are often powerful in their daily lives and long for someone else to control them (Clark-Flory, 2012). In this same manner, deviant comic book women take control from the men surrounding them by using their bodies and sex as objects of temptation. This treachery also instills in these women an aura of mystery, adding to their sex appeal.

While these women exhibit power over men, they must still act as females. In this sense, these women must see and be seen in terms of the gaze, as described by Berger. As such, these deceitful women acquire the attributes of male antagonists as well as pornographic women (Brown). Women of comic books who fit into this category are permitted to battle and exert force and control over men as long as they fully display their female sexuality. This allows these women to remain heterosexual and non-cross

dressers. Recently, however, more characters have been created that fall into the alternative culture of LGBTs, as will be explored in the following section.

In the *Green Lantern* comic books, multiple female characters fit into the deceitful dominatrix role. As described earlier, Star Sapphire is the alter ego of Carol Ferris, Hal Jordan's once lover. As Star Sapphire, she is the queen of the race of women called Zamaron. The group of women who align with the Star Sapphires, a group similar to the group of Green Lanterns, are powered by love and seek to protect love throughout the universe and enact revenge on the men who once loved them. This works simultaneously to demonstrate women's softness as it relates to preserving love and women's vengefulness of revenge. Because they have been given power, these women must find the balance between actively attacking and passively acting as sexual objects. Similar to a dominatrix, Star Sapphire gazes and allows herself to be gazed upon. She formulates plans that often seek to regain Jordan's attention.

Star Sapphire also exhibits the concept of the consequences of allowing women to possess power. In episode 213 "Slave of the Star Sapphire," she states, "He wanted me when I was Carol Ferris—but when I took power, he spurned me!" (Englehart, 1987). Initially, Ferris did not want to become the queen of the Zamaron because she wanted to stay with Jordan on Earth. However, the race of women hypnotized Ferris and convinced

her that Jordan was her enemy. Ferris's rise to power displays the malevolent words and actions used by women to achieve what they seek. Because Ferris refused power in order to stay with Jordan, she also exhibits the notion of how women place love and relationships before career and personal success. Star Sapphire's quote, therefore, aligns with this brainwashing that was performed upon her.

To further inscribe Star Sapphire into the role of a treacherous female, she does not trust other women and seeks to punish them. Women have been described as "ambitious", "backstabbing", and blatantly "bitchy" (Fairley, 2014). In the realm of these treacherous female characters, stereotypes such as these phrases become exaggerated. In the same episode as Star Sapphire's quote above, she captures the current love interest of Jordan, Arisia, and makes her obedient to her commands. These commands demean Arisia by including kissing Star Sapphire's boot and stating how she hates Hal Jordan. Jordan eventually arrives and frees Arisia from Star Sapphires control, thus defeating Star Sapphire (Englehart, *et al.*). Star Sapphire's jealousy of Arisia demonstrates her backstabbing ways and desire for revenge over her ex-lover. Because he rescues Arisia and degrades the overly powerful Star Sapphire, Jordan is able to reinforce his hegemonic masculinity while highlighting Star Sapphire's treacherous ways.

Later in the comics, Star Sapphire and her followers realized that their power has become too strong. Because of this, they alter their rings to decrease their power. They are still driven by love but do not seek vengeance through this love. The downgrading of power exemplifies the notion that women cannot be trusted with power. Instead, women can acquire some power, yet this power must remain in check. The dependence on love as power continues the idea that women place love and relationships above all else.

In addition to Star Sapphire, the female character Bleez exhibits traits of a treacherous woman. Bleez wears tight leather clothing, displays power over men, and distrusts other females. Prior to gaining her power, Bleez lived a near perfect life, gaining attention from multiple suitors. However, one of her suitors, Sinestro, captured her planet and forced Bleez to serve as sexual entertainment for his army. Bleez's sexual enslavement enforces the ideology that women should be viewed as objects in which men can do with as they please. Enraged at Sinestro for her mistreatment and murder of her mother, Bleez killed him with the power she gained from a Red Lantern ring, similar to a Green Lantern ring. A Red Lantern ring, however, gains its power from the wearer's rage not willpower, as is true for Green Lantern rings. The vengefulness of Bleez also works to incorporate the notion of women as untrustworthy and unstable. The rage fueling Bleez's power supplements this idea of deceitful females.

In the comics, Atrocious, the male leader of the Red Lanterns, steals Bleez's brainpower. This reflects the ideology that a woman with a brain and is unafraid to voice her thoughts is dangerous. By robbing Bleez of intelligent thoughts, Atrocious validates his hegemonic masculinity. In turn, Bleez becomes more sexually appealing, as she becomes a female willing to agree to all ideas of her dominant male. Later, however, Bleez regains her intelligence and continues as a Red Lantern, fuelled with rage and dripping with blood from her body and mouth.

In the most recent series of the Red Lantern story, Bleez and a member of Star Sapphire's women followers, Fatality, face off against one another. Again, this demonstrates women's distrust and displeasure of other women. In episode 11, both of these women express how easily women can be persuaded of an idea. Fatality seeks to convert Bleez into a Star Sapphire, powered by love as Bleez attempts to transform Fatality into a Red Lantern, driven by rage. Both sides convince the other of her point as Fatality recognizes the rage inside of her and Bleez acknowledges the futile nature of her rage and aims to find peace and love within her. These women validate the ideology of women being lesser than men because they do not remain strong to the beliefs and fluctuate because of the words and actions of other women.

Star Sapphire and Bleez, in addition to their followers, do not appear in the film version of *Green Lantern*. While these characters are still sexually appealing because of the dominatrix ideology, Ferris as a human appears more sexually attainable to the audience than her alien form. Additionally, images of the Red Lanterns' bloody outfits may have affected the film's Motion Picture Association of America, MPAA, rating. Because adolescent boys are a primary target for comic books, a restricted R, rating would have eliminated much of this target audience and therefore decreased profits. These images would also need to be solidly rooted as sexual if Jordan is to remain the hegemonic male with superior power.

The *X-Men* series also contains treacherous women. Emma Frost is a mutant who can make her body as hard as diamonds as well as read others' minds. Frost used her powers, intelligence, and body to ascend the corporate ladder. This illuminates the question as to how women in society actually attain their leadership positions. If young boys read stories of a woman using mind control and her body to gain success, they are more likely to question how women in their lives attain power. Because Frost can project her thoughts into others' minds, she causes women to appear manipulative like she. If a woman can alter a man's mind this easily, society may ask what else she can convince a man to do. This, along with Frost's skin-tight leather costume, conveys the deviant sex

of a dominatrix. Despite her corporate success, Frost chooses to work as a dancer for a gentlemen's club. Frost gladly accepts the lingerie dress code, as she views her body as a weapon over men. Frost's choice to leave the corporate world also reinforces the traditional idea that business is a man's territory and women should remain in the gaze or as substandard citizens to the men in their lives. This furthers the dominatrix ideology and reveals the power a woman's body possesses.

Frost's ability to transform her body into hard diamonds creates sexual themes. As a continuation of the dominatrix theme, Frost's entire body becomes hard and, therefore, phallic-like. Because dominatrices straddle the gender line between male and female, Frost's hard body acts as a male and appears as a female. Her beauty is furthered by the diamonds, which not only possess great strength and power but also can be described as one of the most beautiful jewels. The hardness factor also relates to the personality of a dominatrix. Frost's emotions can therefore be viewed as hard and cold-hearted. Despite her sexual appeal, Frost appears to lack sympathy and compassion, softer human attributes often described as more feminine. Frost reveals this through her body, words, and actions. Her ability to coerce men with her body not only included her time as a dancer but also throughout her story with various major and minor characters, including Scott Summers, described earlier in this section as Jean Grey's boyfriend.

Frost often switches alliances by acting as a secret agent to win over the trust of a group, such as the X-Men, and then betray them. In a series connected to *X-Men*, Frost shoots her own sister and takes her portion of the family inheritance (Wood & Ellis, 2000).

Frost causes women to appear heartless and untrustworthy. By casting women as devious, the hegemonic masculinity component of controlling women becomes grounded and allows men to appear more trustworthy and genuine.

In the films, Frost still possesses her treacherous ways, yet also has more dependent tendencies. Frost keeps her skin-tight costume and tall leather boots along with her aforementioned mental and physical abilities. However, in one scene her power as a dominatrix becomes reversed as she becomes bound to a bed frame with her arms spread wide and throat slowly being strangled, producing a sexual bondage fantasy. This places the power back in the male's control, which better aligns with mainstream ideology. Frost also requires the assistance of Magneto, a male character, in order to escape from a CIA prison. In the transition from comic books to film, Frost loses much of her own agency and power due to constraints to mold into the mainstream ideology.

In the comic book series of *Thor*, one character, Enchantress, exemplifies the treacherous woman theory. By naming a character this, she already is cast as manipulative, mysterious, and sexually desirable. Enchantress's powers include vast

knowledge of sorcery and seduction. Because she often uses her magical expertise for evil purposes, this establishes the ideology of the danger in allowing women access to knowledge. As demonstrated with other treacherous women described, a woman appears to either become overwhelmed or consumed by knowledge and thus decreases this knowledge and power or uses the information as control. Enchantress also frequently uses her seduction to achieve more power or persuade others to assist her. In addition to her attainment of knowledge, Enchantress embodies the Biblical Eve with her golden apples. Similar to Eve, Enchantress tends over an apple tree of the gods. The apples of Enchantress's tree will only grow if she is present with her unparalleled feminine beauty and must be plucked by her hands. When Loki trades Enchantress to an evil ruler, the citizens of Asgard long for her return so they once again can have their apples. This exchange enforces the concept that women such as Enchantress are objects, pieces that can be traded. Enchantress's ability to provide pleasure for the citizens also substantiates how a woman is a sexual object whose main objective in life is to please others, especially men.

Enchantress later uses these apples to control a man for her own personal gain. In a post-coitus scene, Enchantress tricks this man into eating an apple intended only for the gods. This apple places the man in much pain because he is a human, not a god. To

complete her goal, not relieve him of pain, Enchantress decapitates him. This scene illustrates not only the intellectual and sexual power of Enchantress but also the extent to which she will go to enact her goals (Fraction, 2012).

In other issues, Enchantress goes between acting as Thor's lover and enemy. This creates an untrustworthy image of women. Enchantress's demeanor also questions women's motives for love, as her interest in him as a lover grows as he ascends to the throne of Asgard.

Enchantress also displays her displeasure of other women throughout the comics. Thor often loves other women including Jane Foster and Sif. Sif is an Asgardian goddess who possesses highly developed warrior skills and received Odin's blessing to be with Thor. When Thor chooses to be with either Foster or Sif, Enchantress becomes extremely jealous and spawns a rivalry between Enchantress and Sif. This relates to the ideology of backstabbing women. It also presents the man, Thor, more power. While these three women are all seeking his attention, he is merely tasked with choosing which one. This plays into the adolescent male audiences' fantasies of having women fighting over them.

Enchantress does not appear in either film adaptation. Because of her strong, demanding personality, she presents more of a threat to hegemonic masculinity than

feeble women like Foster who are more willing to follow orders and establish their hegemonic man as more powerful.

LGBT: Out of the closet but not on the screen

In comparison to comic book movies, comic book series have encouraged more progressive ideas of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) community. The series have included characters and plotlines depicting members of the LGBT community. The film versions of these same comics, however, have excluded these themes. A comparison of the comic books and their movies will be explored to examine how this exclusion occurs.

In the *Green Lantern* series, a plotline within the series is dedicated to bringing awareness to the discrimination against the LGBT community. In 2001, *Green Lantern* introduced a major character, Terry Berg, who was openly gay. The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) awarded the issue an award for the best comic book of the year. The series continued to spread awareness of the mistreatment of people in the LGBT community by depicting Berg in the midst of a hate crime (Palmer-Mehta & Hay, 2005).

The two-part issue titled "Hate Crime" describes the discrimination against Berg and the reactions of his family and friends. After going out, Berg and his boyfriend

David exchange a kiss, which catches the attention of three men. These men chase after the couple. In order to help their chances, Berg and David split up. The men pursue Berg, and David is able to escape. After he believes it to be safe, David returns to help Berg. David finds Berg beaten profusely thus causing David to call an ambulance. In the hospital, readers learn how Berg suffered from several broken bones and remained in a coma for several days. During this time, Berg's father refused to allow David into the room to see his son and blamed David for the event and Berg's sexuality. Eventually, Berg's friends defend David, and he is allowed to see Berg. Once Berg recovers, he moves in with David, and the couple made few appearances in the comic since the incident (Winick, 2002).

These issues brought to light many struggles people of the LGBT community must handle. The couple cannot display any form of affection without fear of the outburst that ensued. Because the FBI has reported over 1,450 incidents involving crimes against another person because of his or her sexual orientation, this fear is grounded by legitimate threats and outbreaks of injury or discrimination ("FBI Releases 2013 Hate Crime Statistics," 2014). Additionally, children who are LGBT and have highly unsupportive parents are more than eight times as likely to attempt suicide, nearly six times as likely to express high levels of depression, more than three times as likely to use

illegal drugs, and more than three times as likely to contract HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases (Ryan, 2009). While none of these side effects were described in the issues, the behavior of Berg's father demonstrates the destructive nature of unsupportive parents of people of the LGBT community. Additionally, many people like Berg's father disagree with the notion that homosexuality is natural. These issues were not commonly discussed when the "Hate Crime" issues came out in 2001, which made these issues important pieces in the LGBT movement to spread awareness of the discrimination.

Numerous responses occurred in connection to this two-part issue. The issues and the writer, Judd Winick, received many media hits because not many other entertainment outlets were discussing hate crimes at the time. Many people also wrote letters to *Green Lantern's* company, DC Comics describing their disgust or praise for the "Hate Crimes" issues. As described in the first section of this paper, comic book heroes have long stood for hegemonic masculinity, so to introduce a man who is strong and powerful yet not heterosexual created some controversy and approval. One response letter stated, "this is a book that kids read, and you're telling them that it's okay to be gay. In issue #137 you had GL [Green Lantern] himself say that being gay is not a sin. You have made a mockery of Christianity." Despite this response, the majority of letters DC Comics received were complimentary of the "Hate Crime" issues. Several were written by

members of the LGBT community who voiced their appreciation for mainstream media's decision to discuss issues they experience. One letter described a person's praise for the "Hate Crime" issues because he had suffered from a hate crime and was denied help from police. He stated his appreciation of how DC Comics was willing to describe these real life problems (Palmer-Mehta & Hay). DC Comics chose to use *Green Lantern* to promote a social issue prevalent in society today.

The *X-Men* series has multiple parallels to the LGBT community. The mutant members of the X-Men experience extreme discrimination comparable to the struggle of the LGBT community. The X-Men are viewed as different and foreign to the human race. Because of these differences, many humans shunned mutants and some wanted an extermination of mutants. Comparably, members of the LGBT community are viewed as not normal and discriminated against. Some parents of a child who identifies as LGBT distance themselves from their child or believe that their child can go to a therapist and become heterosexual. Just as there are some characters who have called for the extermination of mutants, there have even been some people who have called for the killing of all people of the LGBT community. In a 2012 sermon titled "The Curse of Homosexuality," Seneca, Kansas, Baptist Church pastor Curtis Knapp called for the United States government to kill all homosexuals. He stated, "They should be put to

death. Oh, so you're saying we should go out and start killing them, no?' — I'm saying the government should. They won't, but they should" (Edwards, 2012). This demonstrates how despite the progress of the LGBT community, there are still people who forcibly disagree with people who identify as LGBT.

As with *Green Lantern* and *X-Men*, the comic book version of *Thor* involves multiple LGBT themes. One of the central characters, Thor's adopted brother Loki, identifies as bisexual. Throughout the series, Loki is displayed courting both men and women. Part of the reason for this is Loki's shape shifting ability. He is capable of temporarily taking the form of another person. This has often been the form of a female. Additionally, the most recent extension of the *Thor* series is called *Loki: Agent of Asgard*. In regards to the series and how Loki is portrayed, the writer Al Ewing stated, "Yes, Loki is bisexual, and I'll be touching on that" (Szymanski, 2013). This demonstrates the comic book universe's acceptance of LGBT themes in their print versions of comic book characters.

Wonder Woman exemplifies the lesbian undertones prevalent in many comic book texts. Since her creation in 1941, people have questioned her sexuality in relation to the Amazon women and the villains she fights. Most of the villains in the *Wonder Woman* comic book universe are female and often hint at sexual desires. In a 1995 issue,

Wonder Woman is bound by several female villains, alluding to sexual acts of bondage. These villains discuss Wonder Woman's "dewy blossoms" and tell her "Just let me touch you, sweetheart. Ordinarily, I'd do this with a kiss, but we don't want to get emotionally involved" (Peters, 2003). These statements strengthen the lesbian ideology associated with Wonder Woman. Wonder Woman is one of the few women characters to receive her own comic book series. This illustrates how a comic book with characters believed to be lesbian can have great success. However, Wonder Woman has yet to appear in a live action film. DC Comics will include Wonder Woman in the film *Batman v. Superman: Dawn of Justice*, set to release in May 2016 and plans to create a *Wonder Woman* movie for 2017. This, however, means that it will have taken 76 years for Wonder Woman to appear in her own live action movie despite her popularity in the comic book world.

In addition to Wonder Woman, the film versions of the three comics primarily analyzed in this article have ignored the LGBT themes. The film adaptations for each of these comic books, *Green Lantern*, *X-Men*, and *Thor*, remove any LGBT themes and highlight only heterosexual themes of the characters. In order to understand the reasoning for this absence, this section will examine the presence of LGBT content in comic books and their absence in the film adaptations.

While comic book creators initially had to be vague about the sexuality of some of their characters, creators have since become more open to including LGBT characters and themes. In the comic book series *Batman* and *Superman*, readers speculated about the relationships of Batman and Robin as well as Wonder Woman and her Amazons. However, Theophano (2002) describes how readers began to question these relationships but “the creators and distributors of these strips were prohibited from developing these relationships.” Similar to these writers, many readers of the past and present feel as though they must pass as heterosexual and ignore any themes that hint at homosexuality in order to remain in the closet. Today, creators have included and elaborated on LGBT relationships. For instance, Batwoman, a spinoff from the *Batman* universe, identified as a lesbian from her creation in the 2006 comic *52* (Johns, 2006). In this issue, Batwoman meets up with a previous lover, Renee Montoya, and shares an intimate moment with Montoya. This demonstrates the writer's willingness to create and fully expose LGBT characters.

Readers often question the sexuality of sidekicks, such as Robin. These sidekicks often assist the hero in fighting crime as well as attracting a partner of the opposite sex. Because of this, the sidekick often does not woo the opposite sex for him or herself. The sidekick, thus, appears either asexual or attracted to his or her mentor. In turn, this causes

the hero to appear more heterosexual and more masculine. Superman's sidekick, Jimmy Olsen, often strengthens Superman's heterosexual identity by cross-dressing as part of his "For A Day" column in the newspaper both he and Clark Kent (Superman) work.

Olsen's editor comments on his success as a cross-dresser by stating, "Half the guys in the country hate you, the other half wanna be you. And let's not forget the half that wants to date you" (Morrison and Quitely, 2006). When thinking of Olsen as part of the LGBT community, this quote identifies the homophobic people, closeted homosexuals, and people who already identify as LGBT. Even though Kent is from another planet, his alienness gets overshadowed by Olsen's oddities (Shyminsky, 2011).

Comic books have chosen to discuss other social issues in addition to the controversy of LGBT themes. McAllister (2004) describes how comic books that are mass produced have addressed the AIDS issue. Marvel had two series discuss the issue. One supporting character, who identifies as gay, contracts a "mysterious illness" that causes the "body systems to break down" and in a different series another character become infected with HIV after he had an affair with another woman. DC Comics also discussed the AIDS concern by using *The New Guardians* characters. These characters get attacked by a villain, Hemoglobin, who later reveals that he has AIDS. The only *New Guardian* character who tests positive for HIV is a gay character, adding to the stereotype

of AIDS existing primarily in the LGBT community (Lipp, 2013). Despite this setback, these comic books exhibit how comic book writers have recognized social issues and discussed these concerns with the large audience who read comic books.

While the movies do not explicitly state homosexuality, there are certain nuances hinting at LGBT themes. Medhurst (1991) describes how homosexual men once had comparable dress codes that allowed them to know if another man identified as gay. In this way, the X-Men identify as outside of the social norm and wear matching uniforms allowing them to know other people who identify as mutants and different from most of society. The movies include this theme that hints to homosexuality. Additionally, the costumes of other superheroes often mask their true identity to protect themselves from the ones they love as well as themselves. In this way, homosexuals often feel they must conceal, or closet, their sexuality in order to prevent themselves as well as their loved ones from being ostracized (Shyminsky). These costumes that obscure their identity are carried over from the comic books to the films.

Comparable to the Motion Picture Production Code for films, comic books created a Comic Code regulating messages. Some policies of the code specifically discussed homosexuality under the "Marriage and Sex" section. These policies stated,

Illicit sex relations are neither to be hinted at nor portrayed. Violent love scenes as well as sexual abnormalities are unacceptable.

The treatment of love-romance stories shall emphasize the value of the home and the sanctity of marriage.

Sex perversion or any inference [sic] to same is strictly forbidden. (Nyberg, 1998)

These policies were intended to keep homosexual themes out of the comic books.

However, by excluding other themes of love and romance, superheroes could not solidify

their heterosexuality. This led to the speculation of Batman and Robin having a

homosexual relationship, as described before. Just as the Motion Picture Production

Code no longer restricts studios' content decisions, the Comic Code has since been

uplifted (Lendrum, 2004). For this reason, neither media has a regulatory necessity to

exclude LGBT themes. However, the film studios adopting the comic book stories have

chosen to subdue these ideas. Rather than choosing to address social issues in front of a

large audience, these studios have opted for hegemonic themes they believe will optimize

their profits.

Despite the progressive nature of comic books and their inclusion of LGBT

themes, there has been some controversy of these themes. After becoming a hit

television series, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* received its own comic book series. Many fans of the television series followed the series over to the comic book version. In the comic book version of the series, the title character is shown in bed with another female. After this issue, many readers sent letters to the comic book studio expressing their outrage. However, heteroflexibility has become quite common. Heteroflexibility involves a heterosexual person, most prevalently female, who exhibits homosexual ideas for a limited time. Other television shows, including *Sex and the City*, *Friends*, and *How I Met Your Mother*, have included heteroflexible themes. In these shows, the women still maintain their heterosexuality because the actions of these characters are portrayed as merely experiments and then the characters return to their heterosexual ways. Many people, however, were upset about Buffy's heteroflexibility because they felt all other female heroes were lesbians, meaning that heterosexual women could not be strong and independent. Additionally, the television series of *Buffy* already included a homosexual female character. This character fit with the LGBT sidekick theme of numerous other comics. Other readers of the comic were pleased with Buffy's choice because they viewed Buffy as selfless and open-minded. These readers believed Buffy's heteroflexibility demonstrated her personality (Frohard-Dourlent, 2012). Despite the negative responses comparable to those for the *Green Lantern* "Hate Crimes" issues, the

writers of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* challenged the societal norm of hegemonic masculinity and demonstrated acceptance for the LGBT community.

Conclusion

Comic book movies extract any LGBT themes present in the comic books and enforce the hegemonic male aspects and manipulate women into limited roles. By using a working definition of hegemonic masculinity, the connections to comic book heroes becomes apparent. These themes become intensified in their movie counterparts. Women in comic books and the films are placed into specific character types, not allowing them the freedom to make choices the male characters receive. These women must either be weak and needing male supervision or dominatrix-like controllers. The comic book movies of *Green Lantern*, *X-Men*, and *Thor* focus primarily on the damsel in distress role. Recently, LGBT themes have become more apparent in comic books. These comic books include LGBT characters and storylines. However, once these comics cross over to the screen, only subtle hints at LGBT themes arise.

Further Research

Further research could examine new comic books and comic book movies for LGBT themes. With the current popularity of these books and movies, more of each are being produced. Additionally, future investigation could include psychological behavior

of readers and viewers, analyzing how the books and movies affect the readers' image of themselves and society.

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